DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 304 836 EC 212 531

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TITLE Art. Chapter Eight.
PUB DATE 88
NOTE 12p.; In: Robinsin, Greg A., Ed., and others. "Best Practices in Mental Disabilities. Volume Two"; see EC 212 523.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Art Education; *Curriculum Development; Educational Practices; Elementary Secondary Education; *Mainstreaming; *Mental Retardation; Skill Development; *Special Classes; *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses ways in which regular art teachers can effectively serve students with mental disabilities and ways in which administrators can guide their districts regarding integrated situations in art education. A rationale is offered for including art education in the education of students with mental disabilities. Factors to be considered when determining whether to offer art in integrated or self-contained classes are discussed. Best practices are presented for teaching art; these practices include the teaching of art for the development of functional skills, for the development of a positive self-concept, for development of spatial intelligence, for aesthetic value, and as a leisure time activity. Also included is a list of goals for an art education program and planning strategies for development of an art curriculum. (JDD)

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Chapter Eight

Art

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OVERVIEW

Students with mental disabilities, as all children, need art experiences to help them grow as a part of their academic learning. They also need situations for practicing appropriate social skills as can occur in a regular art class. Art teachers are seeking guidance in developing appropriate methods for working with these students and want to gain understanding of any special needs that may be present either individually or collectively. At the same time, special educators are also interested in how art education can serve the needs of their students in the most effective manner. Administrators are working with all educators in providing integration for students with mental disabilities. Visual art is often selected as a subject which can facilitate this process.

Two major concerns will be addressed in this chapter. First, how can the regular art teacher, through the art curriculum, effectively serve students with mental disabilities. Secondly, how can administrators direct and guide their districts regarding integrated situations in the area of art education.

BASIC CONSIDERATIONS

P.L. 94-142 mandates each state to adopt a policy that makes a free, appropriate public education available to all handicapped children in the least restrictive environment. Specific types of programs have been established to provide special education students with a least restrictive environment in the general education setting which may or may not include art programming. When art instruction does take place it may be through integrating the student into a regular art class or a special art class in a self-contained classroom. Curriculum for the students in a self-contained setting may be the same curriculum developed for the regular population or may be a special curriculum designed for the population with mental disabilities. In view of the law, it is up to administrators, special and art educators to evaluate their students and decide whether the goal is to provide art education in an integrated or segregated setting.

Art for Students in a Regular Art Class

If art is offered as an integrated class, it is desirable to have agreement from the art and special education teachers about the goals of the art class for these students. Art is an academic subject with a particular body of knowledge and skills to be taught. Curricula are based on cognitive and developmental needs of the students. Lesson objectives are identified and students are expected to meet certain performance level standards.

Students with mental disabilities should be able to follow the same basic curriculum, if integrated into the class for academic purposes. Some adjustments, agreed upon by the art and special education teacher, may be necessary. These may include (a) lowering or adjusting the finished goals (such as requiring fewer steps to completion), (b) providing a support student or aide to insure continuous encouragement, (c) assistance from the special education teacher (in the resource or special classroom) in explaining the instructions, (d) providing previously prepared

sequential instructions which are written on separate cards and may be kept by the student at his or her own desk, or (e) a reward system.

The art teacher will be interested in any information and support the special education teacher can provide. It is a sad reality that at times regular art teachers have only been told "Johnny is coming Monday. Call me if you need help." This process must stop. It is not fair to the regular art instructor to "dump" a student without time for adequate preparation. A brief form with pertinent information from the student's Individual Education Plan would be a suggestion (see Figure 1). This would enable the art teacher to have necessary information without reading the whole IEP. This is a consideration since most art teachers have a large student number to consider and it would be difficult to read every IEP. If, after reviewing IEP information additional support methods or materials are considered to be needed by both teachers, the art teacher would appreciate the assistance of the special educator in providing these materials.

Art may be offered as a social interaction activity in some situations which means the academic or curriculum goals may no longer be pertinent. If social interaction is the purpose the art class would become an opportunity for the student to concentrate on appropriate social behaviors in an art class setting. The media being used should be the same as the rest of the class while, again, the goals for completion may be adjusted and other support systems put in place. In these situations, the special education teacher should have a goal for the student in this area. Since there are no academic expectations, the special education teacher is responsible for monitoring the student.

It is important that the art teacher have the opportunity for involvement in the staffing conference and input to the student's academic, social and behavioral goals. This sometimes must be accomplished between the two teachers prior to a staffing because of scheduling problems.

Art for Students in Self-Contained Special Education Class

If art education is offered in this setting, the art teacher, with input from the special educator, should plan a curriculum which meets the student's academic, behavioral and social skill goals. The curriculum may be a series of lesson plans which are age appropriate, which have been used in another classroom setting, and which address the goals of these students. Whenever possible, if art education is provided in a special classroom both teachers should be looking for ways to integrate this experience into the rest of the school setting, (i.e. art exhibits, sets and props for music or drama experiences, bulletin boards, all school activities, and coordination with other academic subjects).

Rationale for Art Education for Students with Mental Disabilities

It is important to reflect on the reasons that art education is a necessary component in education of students with mental disabilities. In 1980, the National Committee Arts for the Handicapped (currently Very Special Arts) reports on the Senate Bill Report #94-168, which states:

Figure 1

SAMPLE
INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLAN OVERVIEW

NAME_____ D.O.B._____ GRADE_____

PARENT_____ PHONE_____ ED WEIGHT_____

HOMEROOM TEACHER_____ CLASSIFICATION_____

Current Testing Test(s) Date(s) Score	Current Program
Student Strengths	Student Weaknesses
Important Long & Short Term Goals Academic	Important Long & Short Term Goals Behavioral
Important Long & Short Term Goals Social Skills	Staff Relations
Peer Relations	Other

Signed _____
Date _____

The use of the arts as a teaching tool for the handicapped has long been recognized as a viable, effective way, not only of teaching special skills, but also of reaching youngsters who had otherwise been limited. The committee envisions the program under this bill could well include an arts component, and indeed, urges the local education agencies to include arts in programs to be funded under this act. Such a program could cover both appreciation of the arts by the handicapped youngsters and the utilization of the arts as a teaching tool per se.

Engel (1983) states "The arts are cognitive/intellectual/mental disciplines and artists make symbols and meaningful markings in order to communicate meaning." Therefore, as students participate in art activities their learning process may be affected positively. Another researcher (Rafael, 1981) supports this theory by reporting that visual art activities act as a change agent in stimulating minds and imaginations. The art program may offer children, with varying degrees of problems, the first awareness of self.

Students who learn atypically can be effected by a strong art program. Miller and Miller (1982) found that students with mental disabilities are capable of performing complex art tasks that are more difficult than those currently assigned by art teachers. This may be because many art teachers are unsure of the expectations they may have for students with mental disabilities and, as a result, they may underestimate the capabilities of the students. The art program can help the student in every subject through teaching visual literacy in the art program. Art is an important vehicle to begin developing the whole brain. McKim (1980) states the left hemisphere of the brain controls verbal reasoning and mathematical description and the right hemisphere controls the process of feelings and imagination. It is important for students to use both sides of the brain and the visual art program will help the student develop visual literacy, thinking in mental images (right side) to complement thinking in words and numbers (left side). School systems are often focused on left brain activities but some students can learn better using a strong right brain approach.

BEST PRACTICES

An art education program can be an integral part of educating children who may be experiencing learning problems. After reviewing the possible purposes and rationale for providing art education for students with mental disabilities one or all of the following strategies may be appropriate for a student in an integrated or self-contained art class.

Strategy I
Art for the Development of Functional Skills for the Mentally Disabled

A growing number of special educators agree that the educational services for students with mental disabilities should relate to their day-to-day functioning in non-classroom environments. This orientation can be applied to art programming. Functional skills, as suggested by Reid, et al. (1985), which could be related to an art curriculum are:

1. Leisure domain: an activity skill that would be likely to occur among non-handicapped populations of the same age group as the student during leisure time.
   Example: Students often like to make posters for their room or special activities. This is a project that may be accomplished by have the following materials available-11" x 14" paper or poster board, ruler, pencil, and magic markers.

2. Vocational domain: a skill that is part of a vocational task that, once mastered, would be a skill for which the student could be paid.
   Example: Create wooden placques or wood sculptures by learning to sand pieces of wood or parts of wooden designs which would then be assembled into saleable items. They could learn to stain, stencil, or paint the pieces.

3. Communication/Social domain: an action, using materials which could be part of an interpersonal interaction that the student would perform at least once weekly outside of the classroom.
   Example: Sharing materials in an art activity is the same principle as in a social situation of eating a meal together and passing, the food, salt, pepper or waiting a turn to be served.

4. Community living domain: a skill that is part of an activity that would be likely to occur among a non-handicapped population of the same age group in a community setting.
   Example: Cleaning up after an art activity and taking responsibility for one's own materials and helping others put things away is likely to occur with nonhandicapped peers in any group setting such as library, lunchroom, classroom, swimming pool, or gymnasium)

5. Domestic/Self-Help domain: an action that would be performed by someone for the student if the student did not perform the task for himself/herself.
   Example: Washing hands, brushes, and paint pans is an example of what one must do to take care of ones self.

A specific art curriculum could be developed to promote functional skills for the student with mental disabilities in these areas. The activities used to implement the curriculum should be age appropriate for both the actual age of the student and the mental age. All of the areas, leisure, vocational, communication/social, community living and domestic/self-help, suggest an art connection and imply that visual arts could make them more complete. They also have links to the other practices for art education for students with mental disabilities.

Strategy II
Art for the Development of a Positive Self-Concept

One of the major outcomes of art education for any student is the development of a positive self-concept. The act of creating establishes a feeling of self-worth. The feeling of "I made something" confirms the importance of the self. The self-concept is established in both the process and the products of art. At the basic level of the process is the cause and effect relationship. Higher order thinking skills

utilized by the regular student in the process of making art have an additional impact on the self-concept, and to some degree will also impact the students with disabilities.

The pride in the finished product is also important in the development of a positive self-concept. Displays of student work serve to reinforce this, as long as the student feels good about what he or she has made. Very Special Arts Festivals, stressing integrated art experiences have done a great deal to promote students in special education taking pride in their artistic abilities.

The development of a positive self-concept is important to every individual. Art education helps to promote the self, no matter what the ability level. With this as a rationale of art for students with mental disabilities, curriculum specifically focused toward the process and product of art is appropriate and necessary. Curricular emphasis will be placed on cause-and-effect relationships, such as a wet brush makes a smooth appearing surface and a dry brush creates a rough textured looking surface. Finished products and exhibits are also necessary for the development of a positive self-concept.

Strategy III
Art for Development of Spatial Intelligence

McKim, in Experiences in Visual Thinking (1985), makes a strong point for the importance of spatial intelligence (understanding the relationship between objects in space) and visual language (seeing, imagining and drawing or diagraming) as abilities needed to function in our complex society. Spatial intelligence impacts how we perform everyday tasks, how we get from one place to another and how we relate to our environment. Much of the information we get from our environment is in a visual symbol language, so we have a basic need to understand that language. Understanding visual language is becoming an increasingly more important survival skill.

All of us need training in spatial intelligence and visual language. This may be especially important for students with mental disabilities. Art programming that has a major goal of spatial intelligence would be of special importance to students with mental disabilities.

Activities and discussions that promote spatial intelligence will focus on:

1. positive reinforcement of extending visual attention span;

2. identifying shapes in the environment;

3. identifying shapes and color in art works;

4. identifying visual similarities and differences;

5. identifying symbols and determining why the shape and color help the viewer to know what the symbol stands for;

6. determining how objects appear to change in size as they move away from the viewer;

7. recognizing that shapes can be separate, touching, overlapping and interlocked; and

8. identifying repeating patterns of shapes and colors.

Strategy IV
Art as a Leisure Time Activity and for Aesthetic Value

Practice in viewing art work may encourage students with mental disabilities to use viewing and appreciating art as a leisure time activity. Taking students to places where they can view art is also learning to use art as a leisure time activity. Trips to the art museum or art fairs should be a part of the curriculum. Students will learn to behave appropriately as they participate in using art materials for a leisure time activity. Students should become involved in the total processes of projects. Although limited time is a problem, it is important to involve students in the preparation and the clean up of materials and space. This experience will teach them how to choose an activity and how to proceed independently as they would be expected to do in a leisure activity. The art materials selected should be ones that are readily available, safe, and easy to use so they may be used in an unsupervised setting. Making art a leisure activity adds a valuable strategy to the art curriculum.

While students, through viewing art works, learn to make choices students also learn to judge and select colors, shapes, sizes, textures, order, and to make pleasing combinations. Providing the opportunity for students to make decisions helps the students in several ways. Students learn to make judgements based on what they like; they gain confidence in their ability to make decisions by having experiences in a non-threatening situation and they become more in touch with their environment. All of these are important qualities for the students with mental disabilities.

SUGGESTED GOALS FOR AN ART EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS WITH MENTAL DISABILITIES

1. To improve self-esteem, each student will:

   a. successfully complete art projects.
   b. practice successful decision making.
   c. successfully follow directions.
   d. display their individual art work.

2. To improve visual thinking skills, each student will:

   a. exercise the visual thinking process (right brain) by doing projects using guided imagery (e.g. imagining themselves as an adult in a career and then painting that image).
   b. improve right and left brain function through using cognitive skill. (visual perception, auditory perception, verbal communications, and visual communication).

3. To increase large and small motor coordination, the student will:

   a. practice using tools which involve fine motor and large motor skills (large and small brushes, brayers, scissors pencils and rollers).

b. practice large motor skills through gross arms and muscle movement. (arm movements used in art work)

4. To improve free emotional expression, the students will:

   a. be provided an outlet to express their feelings such as releasing anger, through using art materials.
   b. express their feelings through drawing, painting, or modeling with clay.

5. To use and develop leisure time activities and aesthetic values the student will:

   a. visit art museums and exhibits.
   b. observe space aesthetically.
   c. become familiar with books and art reproductions.
   d. use color, shapes and lines in everyday life (dress and environment).

PLANNING STRATEGIES FOR A MAINSTREAMED OR INTEGRATED ART CURRICULUM

Successful strategies would include the following steps:

1. Identify which program the student has been staffed into and communicate that information to all teachers working with the student. This initial communication should also include basic information about the students disability (see Figure 1).

2. Class size should be a consideration if integration is to be a positive situation for the student. When art classes are elective, spaces could be reserved for the special population students. Class size, student-teacher ratio, and the possible barriers should be considered when planning for success in integration.

3. The physical set-up of an art room and necessary equipment needs to be appropriate for all students.

4. Grading policies should be appropriate for each individual student. In some cases the grading system utilized for the regular student is appropriate for those in special education. However, in some situations grades should not be considered, or necessary accomodations should be made (relaxed criteria, shortened assigments, etc.)

5. Inservice workshops could be provided for special education and art teachers. The art teachers may need help with strategies of instruction for students with mental disabilities, and the special education teachers could benefit by gaining information about the rationale and methods of using visual arts in connection with academic and social skill studies.

6. The administration could support integration by approving professional leave for special education and art teachers to work together; supporting in-service workshops for special education and art teachers; establishing appropriate size classes; supporting appropriate grading practices;

assigning sufficient staff for aides to accompany students with disabilities, when necessary, in the art class; and providing funding for adaptive equipment. The administration could take a leadership role in the development of a plan for integration, and actively pursue improved communications between those individuals working for the well-being of the students with mental disabilities.

SUMMARY

Art education for students with mental disabilities is an important area of concern for art and special educators and administrators. Educators are concerned with providing the most effective art education for these students. Art educators want to succeed in providing an appropriate art curriculum for the integrated or self-contained setting. As school districts are implementing the concepts of least restrictiveness, the art and special educators need support from administrators and support staff personnel in making a realistic plan that best suits the students, parents, teachers, and schools. This may require an in-depth, unified review of a school district and school buildings plan for integration. The strategies reviewed here and the steps suggested could be a helpful beginning for an exciting art education program for students with mental disabilities.

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